



Publication HEVRAT PINTO
Under Aegis of RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA
32, rue du Plateau - 75019 PARIS - FRANCE
Tel: +331 48 03 53 89 - Fax +331 42 06 00 33
www.hevratpinto.org - hevratpinto@aol.com
Responsible of publication: Hanania Soussan

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Path

To Follow

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FROM NOAH TO ABRAHAM - BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA

The Mishnah teaches, “There were ten generations from Adam to Noah...ten generations from Noah to Abraham, to indicate how great His patience is, for all those generations repeatedly angered Him, until Abraham our father came and received the reward of them all” (Pirkei Avoth 5:2).

Why did Noah not receive the reward of all these generations? Why was it Abraham who came and took the reward of them all?

We may explain this according to what our Sages have said: “When Noah rebuked them and spoke words to them that were as hard as fiery flints, they derided him. They said to him, ‘Old man, what is this ark for?’ He replied, ‘The Holy One, blessed be He, will bring a flood upon you.’ ‘A flood of what,’ they jeered. ‘If a flood of fire, we have a substance called alitha. And if He brings a flood of water, we have iron plates with which we can cover the earth if He brings [a flood] from the earth; and we have a substance called akov if [He brings a flood] from heaven.’ He replied, ‘He will bring it from between the heels of your feet’ ” (Sanhedrin 108b). Abraham reprimanded people in another way. He did not speak harshly to them, but instead would invoke the Name of the Holy One, blessed be He, through the attribute of chesed. How did he do this? He would open the doors of his tent to everyone who passed by. When guests came to his home, he would give them something to drink and eat until they were satisfied. When they would arise to thank him, he would say: “Did you eat something of mine? You ate from that which belongs to the G-d of the Universe. Thank, praise, and bless Him Who spoke and the world came into being” (Sotah 10b). In this way, the Name of G-d spread among men.

Furthermore, when the Holy One, blessed be He, announced to Noah that He would bring a flood to inundate the earth, He said to him: “Come to the ark, you and all your household, for it is you that I have seen to be righteous before Me in this generation” (Bereshith 7:1). Noah did not pray for the people of his generation, but instead he began to gather his sons and family to bring them into the ark. As for Abraham, when G-d said to

him, “Because the outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah has become great, and because their sin has been very grave, I will descend and see whether they act according to its outcry, which has come to Me” (Bereshith 18:20-21), he began to weep for the inhabitants of Sodom. Thus we read that Abraham said, “Far be it from You to do a thing such as this, to put to death the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous would be like the wicked. Far be it from You! Will the Judge of the entire earth not do justice?” (v.25).

Reprimanding in Love

Why did Abraham pray for the people of his generation, but Noah did not pray for his?

It is because Noah did not possess a love for people in his heart, as Abraham did. Abraham succeeded in greatly spreading faith in G-d only through the attributed of chesed, which was engraved in him and burned in his bones. It was because of this attribute that his generation saw that he loved people, and that his reprimands stemmed from love. Hence they accepted his words and improved their ways. A father who reprimands his son while giving him to eat and drink cannot be compared to a father who reprimands his son without giving him anything, especially if he reprimands him in anger and with harsh words. This is why the reprimands of Noah were useless, whereas those of Abraham were effective. Because people could see that Abraham loved people and gave them to eat and drink, they said: “This one loves people, demonstrates kindness, and does good for them – a sign that everything he says is true, that the Holy One, blessed be He, created the world. Because of his love for us, he sets us free from sin and wants to do good for us, so that we may not be judged like the first generations.”

Good Only Towards His Family

In the Midrash our Sages have said, “When Noah emerged from the ark and saw the world destroyed, he began to weep before G-d and said: ‘Sovereign of the universe, You are called compassionate! You should have been compassionate to Your creation!’ The Holy One, blessed be He, replied: ‘Foolish shepherd, only now do you say this to Me? Why did you not tell Me this

when I said to you: “For it is you that I have seen to be righteous before Me in this generation” [Bereshith 7:1], or when I said, “I will bring a flood” [ibid. 6:17], or when I said, “Make yourself an ark” [ibid. 6:14]? I constantly delayed so you could ask Me to have compassion on the world. Yet when you heard that you were going to be saved in the ark, it never entered your mind to ask Me to have compassion on the people of the world. Instead you entered the ark and were saved. Now that the world has been destroyed, you open your mouth and utter prayers and supplications before Me?” ” (Hashmatot HaZohar, Bereshith 254b). In other words, if Noah had possessed love for people in his heart, as Abraham did, he would have prayed for the people of his generation. In that case, the Holy One, blessed be He, may not have sent the flood, for people would have repented on account of Noah’s reprimands. Yet because he did not possess a love for people, and instead reprimanded them harshly and did not pray for them, the world was flooded.

Noah only demonstrated true kindness towards his family, not towards the people of his generation. He did not reprimand people in a pleasant way, but instead used harsh words in his reprimands, which is why they refused to listen to him. It is why Noah’s reprimands were useless, and it is why he did not receive a reward greater than his deeds. When Abraham came and observed the deeds of his predecessors, he realized that there were disputes and strife in the generation of the flood. He realized that the generation of the dispersion believed that they had achieved peace, but in fact there was no love among them. He took it to heart to rectify what the former generations had damaged. What did he do? He began to reprimand people through kindness, greeting them with a pleasant face and giving them to eat and drink, thereby bringing them under the wings of the Shechinah. That being the case, it was fitting for Abraham to receive the reward of the entire world, for people came to a knowledge of G-d through him, and he achieved what the previous generations had not.

CONCERNING THE PARSHA

THE LONGEVITY OF THE FIRST GENERATIONS

It is written, “Shem lived 500 years after begetting Arpachshad, and he begot sons and daughters” (Bereshith 11:11).

In the Ramban’s commentary on the Torah, he gives a detailed explanation as to the longevity of the first generations, from their birth to their death. He writes:

“The reason for their longevity is that the first man, the handiwork of the Holy One, blessed be He, was made in absolute perfection as regards beauty, strength, and height. Even after it was decreed that he should be mortal, it was in his nature to live a long time. Yet when the flood came upon the earth, the atmosphere became tainted, and as a result their days kept decreasing. Until the flood, their days were about the length of Adam’s; some even lived longer than Adam. Shem, who was born before the flood, lived 600 years. Although he benefited from his innate strength, the tainted air following the flood caused him harm. The days of his sons who were born after the flood were shortened still more, until they came down to 400 years. You can see that this longevity remained with them until the generation of the dispersion, when the change of climate caused by the dispersion affected them, and their days were again shortened. Thus you find that the life of Peleg, ‘in whose days the earth was divided’ [Bereshith 10:25], came down to half their days, i.e., 200 years” (Ramban on Bereshith 5:4).

This means that changes in nature that occurred from time to time were responsible for shortening the human lifespan. These natural changes explain the diminishment in life expectancy among the first generations.

No Such Thing in Israel

From here we move on to the remarks of the Ba’alei HaTosafot, who write (Moed Katan 11a) that we must not use the remedies mentioned in the Talmud because nature has changed, meaning that these remedies do not work in our time. The Rashba was once asked a question regarding an animal that had clearly been rendered treif. Twelve months had passed since that time, and someone wanted to permit it to be eaten because there is a principle which states that a treif animal does not live longer than twelve months. Since the animal was still alive more than twelve months later, it could not have been treif.

The Rashba replied, “If you have seen and heard someone who is lenient declaring that an animal which continues to live is kosher, or that it lacks signs which the Sages have listed in all cases of treif animals, do not listen to him, for there is no such thing in Israel. Whoever declares it kosher is, in my eyes, casting aspersions on the words of the Sages, and we deny his testimony. May the testifier and a thousand like him be nullified, and let not even a dot of that which has been agreed upon by the Sages of Israel, the holy ones, prophets and sons of prophets, and the things which were said to Moshe at Sinai be nullified” (Responsa Rashba 1:98).

Based on these remarks by the Rashba, some of the Acharonim have concluded that the Rashba tended to think as the Rambam did, namely that nature no longer changes in our time. A certain number of halachic conclusions result from this opinion and the objections of the Rishonim in this regard.

For example, the Shulchan Aruch states: “A nursing animal is exempt from [the mitzvah] of bechor, for most animals do not produce milk unless they have had offspring” (Yoreh Deah 316:3). The Rema cites this opinion in stating that “for some, we do not consider the fact that it produces milk” (for nature has changed).

Not Inferior to Any Other Form of Wisdom

Elsewhere, the Shulchan Aruch states: “Between meat and fish, it is a duty to wash the hands [mayim emtzayim] because it can lead to leprosy, and we are stricter with regards to a danger than a prohibition” (Orach Chaim 173:2). The Magen Avraham states, “It is possible that in our time, there is not such a grave danger of evil spirits and other such things. In our days this no longer does harm because nature has changed, without mentioning the fact that everything follows the nature in the place we are in.” (Nevertheless, the Kaf HaChaim still notes: “One whose life is dear to him will distance himself from it and be careful to fulfill the words of the Sages.”) Some books (Yam Shel Shlomo and Kemach Solet) state that in order not to ridicule the Sages, it is prohibited to use the remedies found in the Talmud, for people are not aware that there have been changes in nature with respect to location, and even more so with respect to eras. They do not realize that the generations have become increasingly weaker, and that if the Sages are like giants, then we are like mosquitoes.

If we ask why Ravina and Rav Ashi recorded all the remedies found in the Talmud, given that they were only good for their own eras, the Maharsha replies (Gittin 68) that this teaches us that the Talmud is not inferior to any other form of wisdom. This is because every disease has a remedy in the Talmud for those who understand its language, and scoffers must not say that medical knowledge was lacking to the Sages of the Talmud.

The Chazon Ish concludes, using his marvelously clear and concise language: “It is among the foundations of faith that everything mentioned in the [Talmud] – be it in the Mishnah or Gemara, be it Halachah or Aggadah – all these things were revealed to us by the medium of prophetic power, the power of the intellectual embrace reaching out to the wisdom found in the body, in an era when prophesy existed.”

GUARD YOUR TONGUE

Forbidden to Ridicule

It is forbidden to ridicule someone by speaking of his bad character traits, such as if we notice that he is proud, or that he gets angry without reason and the like, which is certainly a bad thing. Although it is true, who knows if he has not repented and regretted all these character flaws? Even if we see that he has become accustomed to these flaws and does not regret them at all, it is still forbidden to ridicule him, for he may not be aware of the gravity of the prohibitions against them. Perhaps if he were aware of them, he would strengthen himself to such an extent that he would not transgress.

– Chafetz Chaim

AT THE SOURCE

Start With Yourself

It is written, "These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man" (Bereshith 6:9).

Rashi states that the main offspring of the righteous are their good deeds.

Rabbi Elazar Azkari would say, "Although a Jew should strive to have children to serve Hashem, he should above all strive to become a pleasing plant in the eyes of Hashem – pleasing by his good deeds – for then the Master of the garden will find it good to produce other plants from him, plants that will resemble him."

Hence when Scripture lists the offspring of Noah, it first states that he was a righteous man who walked with Hashem, for it was in this way that he had offspring.

Like and Unlike the Ark

It is written, "Cover it inside and out with pitch" (Bereshith 6:14).

Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch of Frankfurt once found himself confronted by a magnificently built Reform temple. It was built and directed contrary to Jewish tradition, for on the outside it looked like a church, and on the inside the dais was not placed in the middle (as is the custom), and next to it was an organ.

When officials from the temple asked him what he thought about their house of prayer, he replied: "This 'house of prayer' is both like and unlike Noah's Ark. Like Noah's Ark, we may say that it is covered 'inside and out with pitch [kopher].' A spirit of heresy [kephira] hovers inside and outside of it. Yet while Noah's Ark saved his family from the waters of the flood, this house will not save anyone who enters it from the flood of ungodliness and assimilation."

Eat Everything

It is written, "And you, take for yourself of every food that is eaten and gather it in to you, and it shall be for you and for them to eat" (Bereshith 6:21).

Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman Zatzal explains the apparently redundant expression "every food that is eaten" according to the Midrash, which states that before the flood, people were naturally stronger and superior to the generations that followed. They would sow their fields once every 40 years, the air during the entire year for them being similar to what it is for us between Passover and Shavuot, and a one-day-old baby was stronger than demons. There is no doubt that their fruits were also certainly different and better, and their fragrance superior, to the fruits that we find today.

To remove every doubt from Noah's heart, so he should not even think of leaving these fruits for after the flood, Scripture warned him that even if he wanted to eat less food during his voyage aboard the Ark, in order to save these fruits for the future, "it shall be for you and for them to eat." In other words, he was ordered to leave nothing untouched, but to eat everything that he had gathered, both he and those with him in the Ark.

For the Sake of Torah

It is written, "Of all the clean animals, you shall take for yourself seven pairs" (Bereshith 7:2).

Rashi explains, "Clean – that which is destined to be clean for Israel. We learn [from here] that Noah studied Torah."

The Levush (Rabbi Mordechai Yaffa) is surprised by this statement, for how could Noah study Torah, since the Gemara states that an idolater who studies it is liable to death (Sanhedrin 59a)?

The Pardes Yosef answers this question according to a story found in the Gemara:

"It happened that a certain non-Jew came before Shammai and said to him, 'Convert me, but only on condition that you teach me the whole Torah while I stand on one foot.' He then repulsed him with the builder's rod that was in his hand. When he went before Hillel, he said to him: 'What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. This is the whole Torah... go and learn it'" (Shabbat 31a).

The Maharsha asks how Hillel could teach him Torah if he had not yet been converted. He explains that since he wanted to study Torah in order to convert, it is permitted.

This was why Noah was permitted to study Torah, for the primary goal of his study was to know which animal was pure and which was impure, to know which pure animals could be brought as an offering to Hashem. It is in regards to this that Rashi wrote, "Clean – that which is destined to be clean for Israel. We learn [from here] that Noah studied Torah."

Through Theft

It is written, "But flesh with its soul, its blood, you shall not eat" (Bereshith 9:4).

In his book Nachal Kedumim, the Chida cites Rabbeinu Ephraim Zatzal in stating that this refers to meat for which a person has placed his life into his hands; i.e., meat acquired through theft and fraud. It is in regards to such meat that the Creator has commanded, "You shall not eat," for the children of Noah received the commandment not to steal (as mentioned in Sanhedrin 56a). We also read, "[David said:] 'Is this not the blood of men who risked their lives to go?' And he refused to drink it" (II Samuel 23:17).

IN THE LIGHT OF THE PARSHA

Noah's Repentance

It is written, "Noah built an altar to Hashem.... Hashem smelled the pleasing aroma, and Hashem said in His heart: 'I will not continue to again curse the ground'" (Bereshith 8:20-21).

We need to explain what purpose the offering of Noah served. After all, even if people were to sin like the generation of the flood, the Holy One, blessed be He, would never bring another flood upon the whole world.

We may explain this according to a statement in the Zohar:

"When Noah emerged from the ark and saw the world destroyed, he began to weep before G-d and said: 'Sovereign of the universe, You are called compassionate! You should have been compassionate to Your creation!' The Holy One, blessed be He, replied: 'Foolish shepherd, only now do you say this to Me? Why did you not tell Me this when I said to you: "For it is you that I have seen to be righteous before Me in this generation"?... I constantly delayed so you could ask Me to have compassion on the world. Yet when you heard that you were going to be saved in the ark, it never entered your mind to ask Me to have compassion on the people of the world. Instead you entered the ark and were saved. Now that the world has been destroyed, you open your mouth and utter prayers and supplications before Me?'"

When Noah saw this, he brought sacrifices and burnt-offerings. Rabbi Yehoshua said, "Why did Noah not ask for compassion for his generation? He thought, 'Perhaps I will not be saved,' as it is written: 'For it is you that I have seen to be righteous before Me in this generation' [Bereshith 7:1], meaning righteous only in comparison to his own generation."

This teaches us that if Noah had actually prayed for the flood not to come upon the world, it would never have occurred. Hence afterwards, when Noah prayed for the Holy One, blessed be He, to have compassion on His creatures, he repented for not having prayed before the flood, and he also brought an offering to atone for his sin. His prayer was accepted, and Hashem vowed to never bring another flood upon the whole world.

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

RABBI MEIR SHAPIRA OF LUBLIN

This week marks the yahrtzeit of Rabbi Meir Shapira of Lublin Zatzal, who proposed the idea of Daf HaYomi. As we know, Rabbi Meir Shapira did not have any children. Yet because of him, many Jews study Daf HaYomi each day and have been able to complete the study of the entire Talmud.

All these people share a deep spiritual bond with Rabbi Meir Shapira, as it is said: “Whoever teaches Torah to the son of his fellowman, Scripture regards it as if he had begotten him” (Sanhedrin 19b).

The book *Nitzotzei Ohr HaMeir* recounts the surprising events that led to the acceptance of the yoke of the Torah in Vienna. This is what happened:

It was Elul 3, 5683, and the decorated municipal theater of Vienna was bathed in light. Taking place was a gathering for the sake of Heaven, namely the Knessia Gedola (General Assembly) of Agudath Israel. Attending this event was a powerful gaon who electrified the hall, a man who arose on the wings of his vision, his eyes shooting out sparks.

He said, “If in each Jewish home, wherever it may be, people were to study a page of Gemara each day, could we have a more concrete expression of the great and eternal bond between the Holy One, blessed be He, Torah, and Israel?”

This is what Rabbi Meir Shapira was asking for by describing the idea of Daf HaYomi in a remarkably imaginative way, a description so fascinating that it moved people’s hearts.

“What a great thing! A Jew travels by boat and takes tractate Berachot under his arm. He travels for 15 days from Eretz Israel to America, and each day at the end of the afternoon, he opens the Gemara and studies ‘Daf HaYomi.’ When he arrives in America, he enters a Beit HaMidrash in New York and finds Jews studying the very same page that he studied on that day. He gladly joins them in study and in prayer, they answer his questions, and the Name of Heaven is glorified, increased, and sanctified.

“Another Jew leaves the United States and travels to Brazil or Japan, and he first goes to the Beit HaMidrash and finds everyone studying the same page that he himself studied on that day. Could there be greater unity of hearts than this? What’s more is that, even until today, there are some tractates that few people study. They are like ‘orphans,’ and only exceptional Jews have consideration for them. Now Daf HaYom will fix all this.”

One more thing: “Our youth – the future of our people – are obligated to begin this mitzvah.”

An Amazing Vision Turns Into Reality

The immense hall of the Knessia Gedola reverberated with shouts and applause.

The proposition was accepted with rare enthusiasm, unanimously. The triple alliance between G-d, Torah, and Israel was renewed before it was broken. The representatives of Orthodox

Judaism within the entire hall took it upon themselves to study exactly one page each day, beginning with tractate Berachot, on Rosh Hashanah of the year 5684.

This amazing vision became reality, precisely on Rosh Hashanah of the year 5684. There were still many people who hesitated, but when the Gerer Rebbe excitedly told his chassidim, after Ma’ariv of Rosh Hashanah, “I will study Daf HaYomi,” it was like an electric current had passed through the crowds filling the courts of Ger, at which point everyone ran to find a copy of tractate Berachot.

A Stunning Surprise

Multitudes of Jews from all around the world began to study Daf HaYomi on that night. In every city, Daf HaYomi study groups began to form. People started to indicate the date using the Daf as a reference, even in documents and newspapers.

Two Jews meeting one another had a common subject to discuss, namely the issues raised by the Daf of that day.

The idea transformed itself into the beloved child of Rabbi Meir Shapira. He would often say, “When the idea of Daf HaYomi came to mind, I wanted to suggest it to the Knessia Gedola as a program solely for the young. I never dreamed that they would decide to implement it for the elders of the generation as well. Yet when I began to explain the usefulness of Daf HaYomi, which in my opinion is great – that multitudes upon multitudes of Jews would study a page of Gemara each day – then the stunning surprise came to me: Everyone unanimously accepted that it was good for every Jew!” Rabbi Meir added, “Happy is the generation in which the great listen to the small.”

“A condensed vision of the world hides within this idea,” he would say when speaking of Daf HaYomi. “Despite the fact that prayer in Israel has always been the duty of the individual, the Arizal still teaches us: ‘When you pray, say: “Leshem yichud... in the name of all Israel” – bind yourself to the community.’ If up to now each Jew has been studying a different page of the Gemara, one person this page of Berachot and another person that page of Berachot, but now everyone is studying the same page, we would have an assembly of the entire Jewish community. If G-d, Torah, and Israel are one, then how much more are G-d, Torah and Israel in a single tractate, a single page, and a single day!”

The page being studied depends on the day itself, each page corresponding to a particular day. Do not go too slowly or too quickly by skipping pages, for if you miss one page, you will have missed one day, and a lost day can never be retrieved.